



# Planning Healthy Meals

## **Session Overview**

In this session, participants will learn the benefits of meal planning including how it can help them save time and money. An educator will discuss the basics of planning meals using the MyPlate guidelines. Participants will practice planning healthy meals and determining how much food to purchase. The group will discuss ways to address common challenges to meal planning and possible solutions.

**Target Audience:** English and Spanish speaking adults

**Group Size:** 5-30 participants

**Time Needed:** 30-45 minutes

## **Behavioral Objectives:**

After the session participants will be able to:

1. Plan two days of healthy, budget friendly meals and snacks.
2. Describe at least three ways to include more fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks.
3. State one way to overcome a personal barrier to planning healthy meals.

## **Key Message:**

Meal planning saves time and money while providing good nutrition to families.

## **Materials Needed for Session:**

- Primary handouts: USDA *What's on Your Plate?* handout, *Network Everyday Healthy Meals* cookbook, and *Meal Planner*<sup>1</sup> worksheet
- Food models, 8-ounce measuring cup
- Optional: WIC Poster: *Sample Meal Plan*<sup>2</sup>

## **Outline of 45-minute session:** *(30 minute session in italics)*

- Welcome & introduction (1 min)
- Activity 1: What's for Dinner? (3 min.)
- Activity 2: Let's Plan! (20 min.) *(13Min.)*
- Activity 3: Review, Improve and Prepare to Shop (8 min.) *(7 min.)*
- Activity 4: Addressing Challenges to Meal Planning (10 min.)
- Conclusion and Evaluation (3 min)

## **Welcome to "Planning Healthy Meals"** (1 min)

1. Welcome and introduce the class topic *(If teaching this class as a series, review the past class and home activities – Refer to "Review" sheet.)*  
Today we will start a two-part class to help you eat right when money is tight. In part one, we will discuss how to plan meals and in part two, we will discuss shopping tips. *(Distribute the handout packet.)*
2. Review the class objectives and the key message.

### **Activity 1: What's for Dinner?** (3 min)

1. How many of you know what you're having for dinner tonight? Tomorrow night? If you can plan at least a few days of meals and snacks for your family you are on your way to:
  - Eating healthier
  - Saving time and money
  - Reducing trips to the grocery store
2. What do you think about when you decide what to eat? (*Offer examples as needed*)
  - Does your family like certain foods?
  - Do you have leftovers? What's already in your cupboard?
  - How much time do you have to prepare and cook the food?
  - Are there new recipes or foods you want to try?
  - What foods are on sale or in season?

**Activity:** Share with the person next to you one recipe your family asks you to prepare often.

### **Activity 2: Let's Plan Meals and Snacks** (20 min)

Meal planning goes beyond just deciding if you are going to have meat, chicken or fish for dinner. To get all the benefits you need to plan the whole plate for your meals and snacks. Today we are going to plan meals and snacks for two days using this **meal planner worksheet**. We will also use the ***What's on Your Plate*** handout as a guide and the cookbook for ideas.

Look at the back side of the ***What's on Your Plate*** handout to find out how much you need from each food group. Here's a new way to plan your meals – let's start with produce! Fruits and vegetables should fill half of your plate. If you don't think you eat enough, plan to get more.

1. Vegetables (green section): (*Start with the column on the left of the handout*)
  - Each person in your family needs 2 ½ cups everyday
  - Write in at least one green, one red, and one orange vegetable for each day. (*Give examples*)
  - Leftovers of these same vegetables can be used later in the week in another dish (*Refer to cookbook: Spud Stuffers or the Chicken and Dumplings recipes*).
  - Don't forget the salsa! Salsa can be used in so many ways - even for breakfast. (*Refer to cookbook: Fresh Salsa and Huevos Rancheros recipes*).
2. Fruits (red section):
  - Each person in your family needs 2 cups every day
  - Write in at least two fruits for each day. You can use fruits for breakfast, snacks, salad, dessert and more.
  - Write in at least one citrus fruit. (*Give examples*)
  - If you want to use juice, only serve it one time per day and make sure to choose 100% fruit juice at the store.

**Activity:** Find two recipes in the cookbook that include fruits.

There are three more food groups and we will talk about all of them at the same time since we often combine these foods when cooking. For example, a bean and cheese burrito has an ingredient from the grain, protein and dairy group. There are many other examples such as macaroni and cheese, pizza and casseroles. To help with this class, please write in a turkey burger for one of your meals. This item includes ingredients from the protein and grain groups.

3. Grains (orange section):

- Each person in your family needs 6 ounces a day. One slice of bread or ½ cup cooked rice, cereal or pasta each count as one ounce. A sandwich made with two slices of bread would count as 2 ounces of grains.
- Write in at least three whole grain choices; try whole grain versions of cereal, bread, pasta, rice and snack crackers.

4. Dairy (blue section):

- Each person in your family needs about 2-3 cups or the equivalent per day.
- Write in an 8 oz glass of low fat or fat free milk (whole milk for children under 2 years of age) with meals or snacks at least 2 times a day. You can use the milk on cereal too.
- A cup of yogurt or 1 ½ ounces of cheese (a piece the size of your thumb) each count as a serving.

5. Protein (purple section):

Many people often start their meal planning with a protein food since it is usually a more expensive ingredient. However, since half the plate should be fruits and vegetables, we planned our meals using those foods first.

- Each person needs about 5 1/2 ounces a day. A 3 ounce piece of meat poultry or fish is about the size of a deck of cards. One egg, one tablespoon of peanut butter or ¼ cup cooked beans each count as one ounce.
- Write in some lean meat, poultry or fish that goes with your vegetables. Remember to remove the skin from chicken to get fewer calories and less fat.
- Try a vegetarian option at least once a week such as beans or lentils and rice, or a hearty bean soup. You'll find a recipe for *Black Bean and Corn Pitas* in your cookbook.
- Remember to try and eat some fish at least twice per week – canned tuna or salmon counts.

**Activity:** Everyone has a turkey burger listed for one of their meals. Tell the person next to you the protein food you planned for another lunch or dinner.

**Activity 3: Review, Improve and Prepare to Shop** (8 min)

1. Look at your meal plan and ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there foods from all the food groups?
- Is half the plate fruits and vegetables?
- Do the meals have a good variety of colors and flavors?
- Are the recipes easy to prepare?
- Will the children like the meals?
- Do you need to make any changes or do you need more ideas for healthy foods?

**Activity:** Tell the person next to you one thing you may want to change or improve.

2. How much food will you need to buy? You can save time and money by determining how much you need before you go to the store. Let's look at two examples:

- a. 100% juice – How much juice should you buy if you wanted to serve a ½ cup of orange juice to a family of four? ½ cup each for 4 people is 2 cups (1 pint or 16 oz)
- b. Meat can be an expensive part of our food budget so it is important to buy and serve the right amount – for health and our wallet! Everyone put a turkey burger on their meal plan so let's see how much meat we will need to buy to feed 5 people.
  - As a guideline, 4 ounces of raw meat becomes 3-ounces of cooked meat due to the loss of water and fat when cooking. Or, just remember that one pound of ground meat serves about 4 people. If a protein food has more bones, fat, water, shells,

etc., then you need to increase to 5 or 6 ounces person. If the protein is lean and already has little fat, or is already cooked, then you can decrease to 3 or 3-1/2 ounces per person.

- To serve a 3-ounce cooked turkey burger we need to buy 4 ounces of raw ground turkey per person to allow for shrinkage.
- Multiply 4 ounces x 5 (the number of people to serve) = 20 total ounces of ground turkey needed, or about 1-1/4 pounds.

#### **Activity 4: Addressing Challenges to Meal Planning** (10 min)

Now we are going to look at some common challenges to getting that healthy meal on the table. We will divide into groups. I will present each group with a meal planning problem. Each group will talk about the problem and come up with ways to solve it. Be creative! In a few minutes, each group will be asked to share their problem and solutions.

Let's start with group one. Please read your problem and share your group's solutions. (*Offer the following possible solutions as needed.*)

##### **Problem #1** – I don't have time to cook

###### **Possible Solutions:**

- Try 'no-cook' meals like sandwiches, salads with canned beans or tuna added
- Use convenience foods – take the help where you can afford it. Try canned and frozen vegetables, bagged salads, grated cheese, pasta sauce. Use complete frozen dinners and boxed casserole kits less often.
- Batch Cook – double recipes or use part of the recipe and freeze the rest for later.
- Remember, you will save time when you plan!
- Choose "quick and easy" recipes. Preparation and cook times are shown for recipes in your cookbook.

##### **Problem #2** – Sometimes I make several items at one meal because my kids don't like or want the same things.

###### **Possible Solutions:**

- Let kids help with the planning. Perhaps they can take turns choosing items or recipes for the meal. If kids help plan and prepare meals they are more likely to eat them.
- Let kids help with meal preparation and serving. Choose jobs that are appropriate for their age.

#### **Conclusion and Evaluation:** (3 min)

You don't have to be perfect. Plan your meals and then change them if you want to take advantage of sale items or the opportunity to try new foods.

##### **Home activities:**

1. Continue using your worksheet and plan meals for one week.
2. Calculate the amount needed for one of the fruits or vegetables in your meal plan.
3. Post your weekly meal plan on the refrigerator to remind you and family members to eat healthy meals and snacks.

##### **Evaluation:**

- Do you have any questions?
- Let's review. (*Distribute evaluation forms or conduct verbally.*)

## Planning Healthy Meals

After attending this class I feel confident that I can:

	Agree Very Much	Agree	I Am Not Sure	Disagree	Disagree Very Much
1) Plan two days of healthy, budget friendly meals and snacks.					
2) Describe at least three ways to include more fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks.					
3) State one way to overcome a personal barrier to planning healthy meals.					

### **Closing:**

Thanks for attending the class and I hope you are now able to plan healthy meals.

*If part of a series of classes:*

At our next class, we will talk about shopping on a budget. Please bring your grocery store circular ads to our next meeting.

### **References:**

<sup>1</sup> Meal Planner <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Documents/NE/WIC-NE-Heal-WhatsCookingItStartsWithAPlanAndAList-MealPlanner-English.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Sample Meal Plan <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Pages/WICNEHEALEducationCampaigns.aspx>

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